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ABSTRACT

To encourage reluctant readers, teachers can use a technique called "read a book in an hour." Students are assigned individual chapters of a paperback novel to read silently. After they have finished reading, they retell the significant chapter events, state the conflicts, and identify the characters as the teacher records the information on the chalkboard. A sentence combining activity can be used following a "read a book in an hour" session. The teacher writes student contributions in short, simple sentences on the board and then asks students to combine the sentences either working alone or in small groups. Instruction in comprehension also can be enhanced by use of the "read a book in an hour" technique. Organizational patterns used by authors, such as cause and effect, comparison and contrast, time order, and simple listing, can be recognized by students as they analyze a story. Activities which might teach these elements are numerous. "Read a book in an hour," then, can be a valuable technique by itself for encouraging reluctant readers or it can be combined with other exercises to teach several language arts skills. (TJ)

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READ A BOOK IN AN HOUR: VARIATIONS*

by

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Recently (Smith 1978a, 1978b), I discussed a motivational technique that subject matter teachers can use to interest reluctant readers. The technique entitled "read a book in an hour" has proved to be an effective way of introducing adolescents to literature. A book is read in an hour in a rather unusual way. That is, the teacher renders a paperback into individual chapters, distributes a different chapter to each student for silent reading and, then, has each student recount the important plot events of his chapter to the class. The teacher serves to guide both the reading and re-telling. The reading is guided in that the teacher assigns chapters of appropriate length to students in accordance with their reading ability. That is, proficient readers get longer chapters; less able readers get shorter ones. In this way, all students finish the reading portion of the activity at about the same time. The re-telling is guided in the form of a structured discussion. That is, the teacher writes several headings on the chalkboard (setting, significant chapter events, conflicts, characters, and the like) as the students are silently reading. Then, as the students re-tell the events which took place in their chapters, the teacher acts as a discussion leader. For instance, if a student neglects to mention an

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important plot element, the teacher attempts to ferret out this information by asking open-ended questions. This type of procedure emphasizes the importance of accurate student contributions. Further, it is superior to the situation where the teacher provides everything and thereby excludes the students from the activity. The teacher should supply the missing information only as a last resort. Once the student has re-told the story line in his chapter, the teacher summarizes and records the contribution beneath the appropriate chalkboard heading. In this way, the students can refer to the chalkboard for clarification as the story unravels.

My experiences with "read a book in an hour" have been most pleasant. Students enjoy the technique because they don't have to read aloud, and teachers enjoy it because it allows them to introduce students to a literature selection in a relatively short period of time. The net result is often a recreational, yet structured, reading session.

In recent months, several teachers have approached me to ask, "Can 'read a book in an hour' be incorporated within an instructional sequence?" My response to their question, for the most part, has been cautious but positive. Cautious in that I am reluctant to have a structured, recreational reading activity assume seemingly punitive characteristics. I feel that it is important to mention this within the context of a common reading abuse. Specifically, many teachers exhibit a certain degree of apprehension when students complete an in-class lesson before the period ends. To combat this uneasiness, they sometimes force

reading material upon these early finishers. However, in doing this, they not only use reading to punish the early finisher but they also serve an extremely negative reinforcement upon recreational reading. If one accepts my premise that "read a book in an hour" is a useful motivational technique for reluctant readers, one can see my reluctance to deviate from the intent of the procedure. However, I do feel that in some instances the technique can provide a significant complement to subject matter instruction. The purpose of this article will be to illustrate this possibility through a discussion of applications of "read a book in an hour" to the teaching of composition and comprehension.

Composition

In recent years, composition teachers have been employing an in-class writing activity called sentence combining. In brief, students are given a set of short, simple sentences which they must re-write by combination and rearrangement (Miller and Ney, 1967; Mellon, 1969). For example,

1. Tom is agile
2. Tom plays football

In combining the sentences, students try to preserve the original meaning. For example,

3. Agile Tom plays football. or,
4. Tom, who is agile, plays football.

Western (1978) indicates that sentence combining is not only an activity that students enjoy but one that helps them instructionally in that they may use syntactic structures that they previously avoided.

While a number of exercise books are available for instructional use (Strong, 1973; O'Hare, 1975) and at least one structured format for generating sentence combining exercises exists (Cooper, 1973), it seems logical for teachers to seek alternative means of generating sentence combining activities. One such way is to consider the following proposition within the context of a sentence combining unit of approximately one week. During the first two days, students are introduced to sentence combining in the traditional way (Miller and Ney, 1967; Mellon, 1969); and, they receive practice in it through commercially available materials (Strong, 1973; O'Hare, 1975). On the third day, the teacher interrupts the lesson with a literature activity. Specifically, a high interest adolescent novel is introduced with the "read a book in an hour" technique (Smith, 1978a, 1978b) or a different literature related activity (Coombs, 1977). Then, during the final two days, the teacher returns to the sentence combining lesson using exercises based upon the novel that the students have just read.

It seems reasonable to include "read a book in an hour" within a sentence combining unit such as this in at least two ways. The first is that both activities are enjoyed by students (Smith, 1978a, 1978b, Western, 1978). The second is that the teacher has a ready-made source of sentence combining problems following the class discussion of the book read in an hour. The source is the chapter summaries proffered by students and recorded by the teacher. For example, in The Cay by Theodore Taylor, the first three chapters could be summarized as follows:

Chap. 1. In February of 1942, twelve year old Philip Enright is growing up on the island of Curacao. Curacao lies off the coast of Venezuela and its principal industry is an oil refinery. Philip's father is an engineer at the refinery.

Chap. 2. Because of the threat of an attack on the refinery by a German submarine, Philip and his mother leave Curacao for the mainland on a ship called the Hato.

Chap. 3. The Hato is torpedoed on April 6th. In the confusion of the attack, Philip is separated from his mother and knocked unconscious by a piece of flying debris. Philip awakens on a raft with a West Indian named Timothy and a cat called Stew Cat.

These summaries can be transformed into a string of short, simple sentences by the teacher with a minimum of effort. For example,

1. Philip Enright is twelve years old.
2. He lives on the island of Curacao.
3. Curacao lies off the coast of Venezuela.
4. An oil refinery is on Curacao.
5. The time is February 1942.
6. A German submarine threatens to attack the refinery.
7. Philip and his mother leave Curacao.
8. They embark on the S.S. Hato.

The students then combine these sentences, working alone or in small groups.

Please note that elements which function here are interest, motivation, and experience. The Cay has a plot structure characterized by suspenseful action building to a pronounced climax which is likely to hold student attention by the interest it creates. Also, the in-class reading provides a tangible, concrete experience upon which to base a sentence combining lesson. This latter reason is especially important when

one considers the problem that some students have in relating to relatively abstract lesson stimuli. Sentence combining exercises, like other language exercises, could prove difficult or uninteresting if they are presented cold from a textbook, with no effort to relate them to students' interests and experience. A teacher can circumvent this possibility by fostering student motivation one day by reading a book in an hour, then by using the story line as the basis for a succeeding lesson on sentence combining.

Comprehension

While sentence combining is a rather recent instructional device, teachers have for years been extolling the virtues of teaching comprehension. Herber (1978) proposes that instruction in comprehension above literal or primary meaning levels can be enhanced by first making students aware of the idea patterns which authors typically use to organize their prose; and, then providing instruction which manipulates these elements. Among the organizational patterns to which Herber (1978, p. 78) refers are:

> (1) Cause/Effect: Two or more factors (objects, events or ideas) are presented with an indication, either explicit or implicit, that in any interaction among the factors one or more takes action (cause) while the other reacts to that action (effect).
>
> (2) Comparison/Contrast: Two or more factors (objects, events, or ideas) are presented to show likenesses (comparison) and/or differences (contrast) among them.

(3) Time Order: Two or more factors (objects, events or ideas) are presented with an indication of a sequential relationship between or among them. The relationships are considered in light of the passage of time and/or the application of logic.

(4) Simple Listing: Two or more factors (objects, events or ideas) are presented, one after the other. No significance is intended from the fact that one is mentioned before the others because, to speak of two or more factors, one must be mentioned before the other. Authors may qualify the listing by such criteria as size, weight, or importance.

"Read a book in an hour" provides one stimulus for the manipulation of these organizational patterns. The stimulus is the summarized and recorded components (setting, significant chapter events, conflicts, characters, and the like) from a previous day's lesson in which a book was read and discussed in an hour. Here are a few illustrations of ways in which such stimuli might be used.

Cause/Effect. In The Cay a major conflict involves Philip Enright's rejection of his parents' values and his efforts to form his own. This conflict is evidenced in his internal struggle to rationalize the negative racial attitudes imposed by his mother with the positive experiences he has with his West Indian companion, Timothy. The resolution of this conflict comes at the end of Chapter 13 when Philip, who is blind, asks of Timothy, ". . . are you still Black?" By utilizing the chapter summaries as a reference, teachers can help students manipulate

cause/effect relations by asking for evidence (cause) which shows that Philip has changed his attitude and opinion about Blacks (effect).

Comparison/Content and Listing. These patterns of organization can both be taught in reference to the two main characters of The Cay, Timothy and Philip. Within the course of the story, circumstances require that both individuals care for and instruct each other. After placing each character's name on the chalkboard, the teacher asks the students to list examples of how each character cared for or instructed the other. For instance:

Philip	Timothy
1. Nursed Timothy during a malaria attack.	1. Saved Philip from drowning.
2. Wove sleeping mats	2. Taught Philip survival arts
3. Provided fresh coconuts by climbing trees to fetch them, etc.	3. Taught Philip self-respect and self-confidence, etc.

Once this listing is complete, likenesses (comparison) and differences (contrasts) between the characters can be discussed in terms of their age, education, maturity, self-concept, and so forth.

Time Order. Time order or sequence can be taught by giving small groups of students 3" x 5" slips of paper (one per chapter) on which the chapter summaries (minus the chapter reference) have been printed. The students are required to place these slips in the correct sequence based on their group recollection of the story. In this activity, it sometimes helps to give students blank 3" x 5" slips on which they can add information which they deem important to clarify the sequential arrangement at which they arrive.

Sentence combining and "read a book in an hour" are high interest activities that allow students to use concrete points of reference as they manipulate syntax and patterns of idea organization found within an adolescent novel. A piece of adolescent literature is first read for enjoyment and is then used to teach either composition or higher comprehension skills. Teachers are urged not to lose sight of the motivational value of a technique such as "read a book in an hour." Far too often activities such as this become punitive when their pleasurable intent is violated or compromised. However, teachers can complement their instruction within the areas of in-class composition and comprehension development by keeping the proper perspective upon the instructional strategies that are involved. In instances such as this, not only does a technique such as "read a book in an hour" retain its recreational attributes but it also enhances other components within the language arts curriculum.

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